**Words to Live By**

Aimee Labrie

He’s confused. Too shy. His sister died of leukemia when he was thirteen. He’s not over his wife yet. He’s intimidated by your sarcastic sense of humor. You’re smarter than he is and he can’t handle it. He’s lost. He doesn’t know what he wants. He’s never had a long-term relationship. He’s young. He works too hard. He’s brilliant, contemplative, needs to learn that it’s okay to be vulnerable. Immature. Terrified. He needs to grow out of his Peter Pan syndrome. But you know what? She really hurt him.

Remember when he pushed your hair out of your face and tucked it behind your ear just like in the movies? And worked hard to make the perfect tuna casserole, sweat gleaming from his forehead under your kitchen light. He admired the dew on the spider webs and knew his fauna well. That one time, he said something so funny you almost peed your pants. Remember when you studied together at the Café Gourmet and you pre­tended to read *The Color Purple* and he was so beautiful, look­ing down at his book, his hand resting on his cheek, writing in the crooked left-handed way of his. He admired your Bettie Page poster.

He says your name before he comes. He’s affectionate after. You both love Woody Allen films, making fun of stupid movies, sushi, Indian food. You agree you’re not sure what happens when you die, but the two of you verge on hopeful atheism. He said you are the sexiest woman he’d ever met. He did the dishes without you asking. He’s not bad in bed. If only he would read something besides Nietzsche or Jack Kerouac.

He’s in medical, dental, law, graduate school, trying to finish his dissertation on Chaucer. He can’t leave Maggie, his golden retriever, overnight. He once had major surgery. He doesn’t real­ize he’s homosexual. They moved around a lot when he was a kid. His mother was a bitch, cold, too protective, insane, unsteady, emotionally abusive, demanding, a martyr. His father made him play football when he didn’t want to. He’s an only child.

He taught you how to identify a deciduous tree, appreciate the artist Lempicka, comprehend Aristotelian philosophy, admire alternative country music, pick a good avocado, appreciate vintage Spiderman comic books.

His parents divorced and he still blames himself. His parents have been married for thirty-five years and he’s afraid he’ll settle for a love less bright or some shit. He’s an Orthodox Jew. He’s moving to New York in three months. He has a yet-to-be diagnosed personality disorder.

He would never hit you. He’s a feminist, a vegetarian, a fallen Catholic, a poet, a canoe-maker, a yogi. He said, You’re the smartest person I’ve ever met. He bought you a beautiful red dress and took you out to dinner and then fucked you over a chair. He knows how to talk to babies. You look prettier without make-up, he said. His life—it’s too complicated right now.

You shouldn’t have slept with him the first night. You shouldn’t have waited. You confessed too much. You didn’t tell him how you really feel. You shouldn’t have said that thing.

It’s not him; it’s you.

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